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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000319

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED MISSING SENSITIVE CAPTION)

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SUBJECT: BMENA FACES CHALLENGES IN TURKEY

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11. (SBU) Summary. On July 31, NEA Acting DAS Madelyn Spirnak met with the director and officers of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) Foreign Policy Program to discuss the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiatives and methods of achieving greater GOT buy-in to the programs. TESEV had recently finalized its feasibility study for a Middle East and North Africa gender institute based on a mandate from the 2008 Forum for the Future held in Abu Dhabi. Program director Mensur Akgun said that TESEV was pushing GOT MFA to take part in the BMENA process. Success in this endeavor would require a reorientation of BMENA initiatives. Instead of "talk shop" conferences, as he categorized the current Forums for the Future, Akgun suggested establishing an OSCE-like institution with a regional network of civil society organizations as a means of motivating more civil society and government support and involvement. End Summary.

#### Cairo Speech Reaction

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12. (SBU) In response to A/DAS Spirnak's request for civil society reaction to President Obama's Cairo speech, Akgun said the speech had more of a negative than positive impact on interest levels. Specifically, delivering the speech in Cairo, indicated that the President was focused more on regional "security aspects" than on establishing benchmarks for democracy in the region, he said. Akgun said he understood this would increase Egyptians' willingness to develop closer relations with the U.S. However, he noted that civil society representatives from the Middle East with whom he spoke at a recent Athens conference were extremely disappointed that the President did not take a stronger stance on regional democracy issues. Akgun said he thought the speech in Ankara was stronger than that in Cairo. DAS Spirnak advised Akgun that several young democracy advocates participating in a Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) met with State and NSC officials the day after the speech and gave a much more positive review of the speech. She advised Akgun to review the President's Ghana speech (he was not familiar with it) to gain more insight into the Administration's views on governance, the rule of law and human rights.

13. (SBU) Because of disappointment in the Cairo speech and concern that the Obama Administration might not support continuing BMENA, Akgun urged Secretary Clinton's attendance at the next Forum for the Future. He emphasized the

importance of USG public statements noting continued support and involvement in BMENA initiatives. He also suggested that the civil society network established through the Forum for the Future be institutionalized and focused on one particular issue at the next Forum. The format he suggested would mirror the OSCE or Council of Europe. Such an OSCE-like institution could not be created immediately, but this would be the goal.

He said he believed Turkey would be ready to play a leadership role in such an institution. In response to A/DAS Spirnak's question regarding the willingness of BMENA countries to follow a Turkish lead, Akgun said that a recent poll about impressions of Turkey conducted in seven Arab countries indicated they would be willing to support Turkey's regional leadership.

14. (SBU) Akgun dismissed A/DAS Spirnak's discussion of potential Presidential initiatives in the areas of education and economic empowerment; he did not consider these BMENA objectives to be worthwhile, questioning the use of U.S. resources in these areas. He expressed his pessimism about the private sector's efforts to contribute to the democratization process of countries given that they are "generally clients of the regime in power."

#### Anti-Americanism Detracts from GOT's BMENA Involvement

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15. (SBU) Akgun also opined that given the anti-American atmosphere the GOT was unlikely to invest more effort in BMENA initiatives. He cited the example of Prime Minister Erdogan's condemnation of America's "Greater Middle Eastern Initiative" in a recent off-the-cuff speech. Most Turks are not aware that the GOT is a participant in BMENA and Erdogan's populist approach exploits America for his own political ambitions, according to Akgun. Akgun suggested a new, "non-geographically-tagged" name for BMENA that might spare it from such public condemnation.

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#### Moroccan Gender Studies Institute

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16. (SBU) TESEV received positive and receptive response from the government of Morocco on its initiative to open a gender studies institute in Morocco. Additionally, according to feedback from countries in the region, they support the establishment of an umbrella organization/institution that collects information for general consumption and use by regional NGOs. TESEV's Ozlem Gemici described the benefits to such an institution as regional NGO network building, the sharing of best practices, and the coordination and collaboration between NGOs on proposals and grant opportunities. In addition to the main office in Morocco, regional respondents indicated they would like to see regional offices of the Institute in the Middle East and Gulf as well.

17. (SBU) Comment. If Akgun's observations and speculations are correct, BMENA faces significant challenges in gaining support in Turkey. A restructuring of the strategy of Forum for the Future with clearer objectives in fewer policy areas, and a confirmation of continuing USG support for BMENA could help sway the Turks to re-engage. TESEV's dismissal of BMENA's economic and educational initiatives, despite their support for the democracy initiatives, may in part be related to the fact that TESEV itself does not operate in those areas. The cable has been cleared by A/DAS Spirnak. End Comment.  
WIENER